U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

Police Referral in Metropolitan Areas

Summary Report

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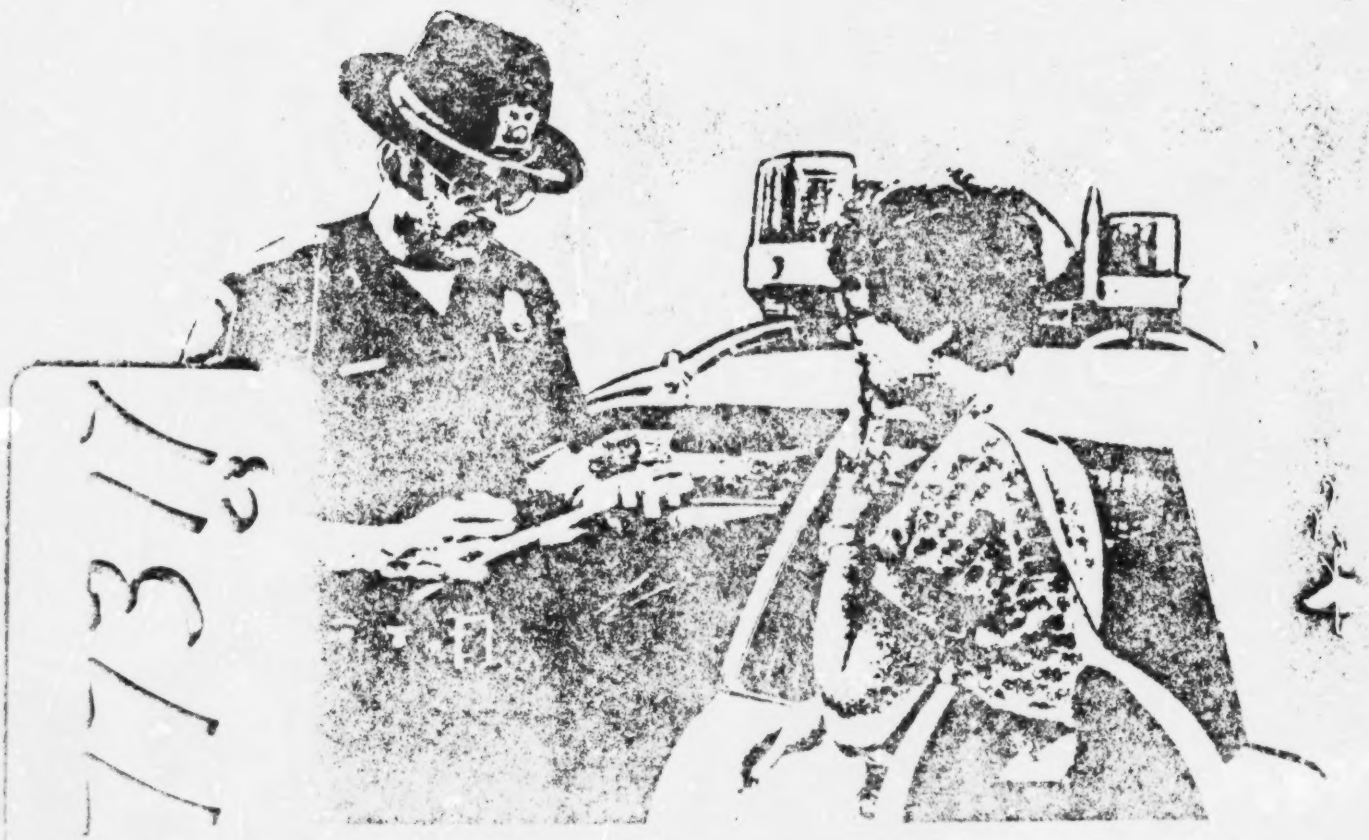

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Harry M. Bratt
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POLICE REFERRAL IN METROPOLITAN AREAS
Summary Report

Eric J. Scott

July 1981

U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

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National Institute of Justice
Harry M. Bratt
Acting Director

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INTRODUCTION

The research described in this report catalogs the characteristics of social service agencies that accept referrals from the police, assesses the extent of patrol officers' referral activities, and examines patterns of police interaction with referral agencies. It is the culmination of a two-phase, three and one-half year examination by members of the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis at Indiana University. The first phase produced an assessment of literature on police referral practices and developed a research design and a set of instruments for examining referral. The second phase carried out the research and analyzed the collected data. Data were gathered by observing complaint room procedures and monitoring citizen calls for service, by accompanying patrol officers during shifts of duty, and by interviewing patrol officers, representatives of referral agencies, and citizens who had been referred.

Three reports have been issued from the second phase of this project and are summarized in this volume. The first, The Referral Agency Interview and Narrative Forms Methods Report, details the methodology used in collecting data on referral agencies. It describes sampling procedures, instrument development, and the ways in which the form was administered. The second, Calls for Service: Citizen Demand and Initial Police Response, is a description of the distribution of demands on the police. It emphasizes the importance of detailed call classification and discusses information calls, an often overlooked portion of demand. It then examines the effects of caller characteristics on the distribution of calls for service. The report discusses the role of police telephone operators in channeling service requests, classifies their responses, and charts response tendencies

across the range of calls received. Finally, it studies operator referral activities.

A third report, Patterns of Police-Referral Agency Interaction, describes referral agency characteristics including services rendered, staffing and funding patterns, and relations with clients. It then examines patrol officer referral activities, noting the frequency with which referrals are made during police-citizen encounters. It discusses officer attitudes toward referral and their awareness of community agencies.

Results indicate that referral has not been explicitly defined, that few departments have established clear policies outlining situations in which referral is appropriate, that operators have not often been considered as referral agents, and that patrol officer referral is infrequent. Referrals by both operators and patrol officers are usually determined by the nature of the problem regardless of citizen behavior patterns or characteristics, officer attitudes, or the presence of other personnel at the scene. Departmental referral policies are generally unwritten or nonexistent, leaving the decision to refer to the discretion of the officer or operator. Assessment of referral's effectiveness in dealing with citizens' problems or in reducing departmental workload awaits further research.

CHAPTER ONE

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

In recent years the manner in which police respond to citizen calls for service has received increasing attention. Given an endless, seemingly growing citizen demand for services, police have sought alternatives to traditional responses that emphasize speed and effectiveness. Most have focused on technological change: improved systems for vehicle tracking, computer-assisted dispatching, automatic telephone number indicators or call locators, centralized phone answering and dispatching centers, and wider communications networks have been installed in police departments across America.

What Is Police Referral?

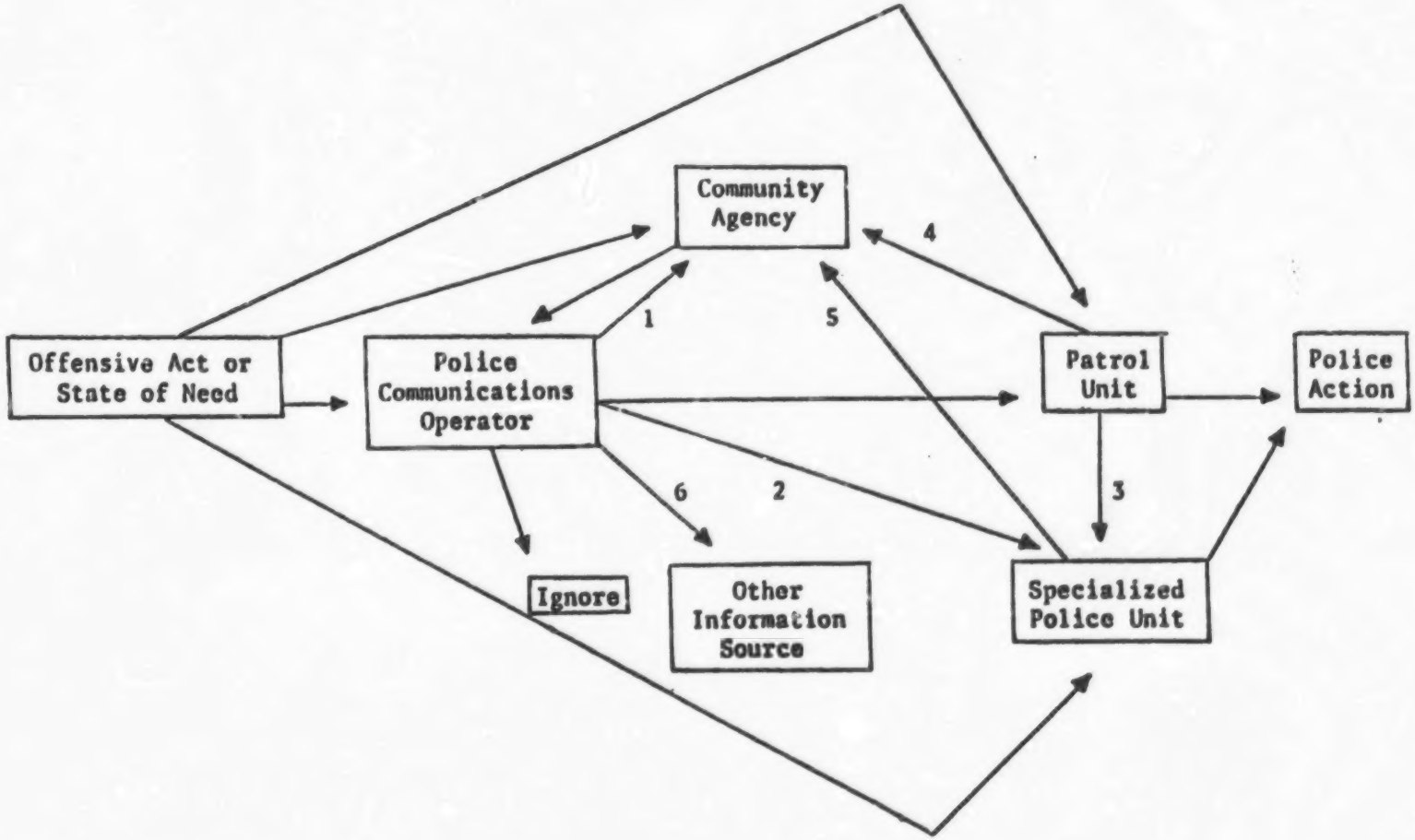
Interest in developing "people-centered" response alternatives has also grown, although their application by police has lagged behind technological innovations. Police referral and diversion programs, however, have frequently been offered as alternatives to traditional arrest-to-trial criminal justice processing. Often applied to patrol officer actions upon initial field contact with offenders, referral implies a reduction in the impact of the criminal justice system on individuals. It attempts to direct or attach individuals to different agencies either inside or outside the criminal justice system. By undergoing rehabilitation, counseling, or other treatment from outside agencies, individuals are often able to avoid justice system processing. Police case handling time is supposedly reduced, fewer persons are brought to trial, and resource and manpower

allocation is conserved. Referral is regularly applied to patrol officer contacts with nonoffenders as well. Few observers, however, have recognized that referrals can also be initiated by police telephone operators. We consider one aspect of referral to be the act of directing callers either to specialized units of the police department or to helping agencies outside the department for more appropriate handling of a case or service request. Referral need not be limited to face-to-face interaction between officers and citizens.

Figure 1 is a police referral decision chart. Each numbered path represents a specific referral decision. Figure 1 diagrams only initial decisions, not the entire referral process; it does not indicate the ultimate effects of case disposition on referred individuals. It shows that police referrals can be made by patrol officers, members of specialized units (including juvenile officers or family crisis team personnel) or by departmental telephone operators or dispatchers. While greatest emphasis has been on patrol officers' referral activities, Figure 1 highlights the importance of telephone operators in the referral process. Without prior operator action, few referrals could occur. If an operator ignores or otherwise prevents a citizen's request from being filtered to the dispatcher, there can be no referral. An operator can refer by providing information to a caller directly, by giving the telephone number or address of an appropriate agency or internal office, or by making a call on behalf of the citizen. Operator referrals may be volunteered or provided at the caller's request. Our conception also includes more traditional police referral activities -- those performed by officers on the street. Officers may refer to specialized internal police units or to outside community agencies, or they may simply provide information.

Figure 1

Police Referral Decision Chart



Project Background

Research summarized in this report is the culmination of an on-going interest in police referral among members of the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis at Indiana University. Our first effort at understanding referral resulted in the publication of a major assessment of the available literature. Case Disposition: An Assessment of Literature on Police Referral Practices was published in January 1979. It discussed police referral practices and examined historical perspectives on the police role in social service delivery. It identified 11 key hypotheses related to police referral and presented, in both tabular and descriptive form, an inventory of the literature relevant to each hypothesis; major books and articles were abstracted. Finally, it evaluated the literature and suggested directions for further research.

Project Objectives

Some of these suggestions were implemented when, in the summer of 1977, a research team from Indiana University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill initiated a study of police referral practices in three metropolitan areas: Rochester, New York; St. Louis, Missouri; and Tampa-St. Petersburg, Florida. This research was coordinated with a major study of police patrol service delivery in 24 departments serving 60 neighborhoods in the same three SMSAs. The companion studies were designed to improve understanding of referral activities of patrol officers and police telephone operators, of community referral agency services and activities, and of patterns of police-community agency interaction.

The research team examined activities of officers on patrol and ways in which the structure of both police departments and communities affect patrol officer behavior. Effects of differences in patterns of patrol service on residents were also studied. We undertook a comparative examination of referral agency characteristics to see what patterns, if any, emerged. Since it became clear early in our research that to understand referral one must first understand the nature of citizen demand, much of our attention was initially focused on calls for police service.

Criteria for Site Selection

The Rochester, St. Louis, and Tampa-St. Petersburg metropolitan areas were selected for study after careful consideration of several SMSAs. Selection was made on the basis of several criteria including number and size of police departments present, range of organizational arrangements for providing patrol service, diversity and extent of activity of both internal police department and community social service agencies that accepted police referrals, perceived police referral activity, and ease of access to both police departments and community agencies. Information was gathered from field interviews with police and other local officials and from baseline data obtained in an earlier phase of a study of police services in 80 metropolitan areas.[1]

The basic unit of anlaysis for most data collection was the neighborhood, although not all samples relate to that unit. The neighborhoods are contained in 24 police jurisdictions in the three metropolitan areas. A total of 60 neighborhoods were selected for study: 11 in the Rochester SMSA, 25 in St. Louis, and 24 in Tampa-St. Petersburg. Four police agencies

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[1]See Elinor Ostrom, Roger B. Parks, and Gordon P. Whitaker, Patterns of Metropolitan Policing. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger Publishers, 1978).

were studied in Rochester, 8 in Tampa-St. Petersburg, and 12 in St. Louis. The neighborhoods were originally selected within income and racial composition strata to provide variation on both of these important social dimensions. Several additional selection criteria were employed, including a high degree of homogeneity in land use patterns and neighborhood size. Neighborhoods were predominantly residential in character and were nominally 5,000 to 10,000 in resident population. Two final criteria aimed at matching neighborhood boundaries to existing police service delivery areas (patrol unit assignment areas, usually called beats), to 1970 Census tract and block group boundaries, or both.

Types of Data Collected

Calls for Service Data

We recorded information from more than 26,000 incoming calls for police service and noted telephone operators' responses to each call. Both direct observation and monitoring tape recorded calls were used. Observers coded as many calls as possible during a shift; no attempt was made to observe every call on busy shifts or in large departments. Citizen requests were classified according to a list of 236 problem codes; each call could receive as many as three codes in case a citizen made more than one request. Operator responses were handled similarly; up to three responses could be coded for each call from a list of 36 possible responses. Observers wrote verbatim accounts of both the nature of the citizen's request and the operator's response

for all calls. They coded other information such as the location to which a police unit was to be sent, the callers' name and address (if given), perceived caller attributes such as sex and race, and the caller's position in the community (private citizen, business or government agency representative). If the caller was referred or transferred, the type of agency receiving the call was also coded.

Calls for service data were collected in 21 of the 24 departments according to a carefully developed formula for shift selection.[2] Fifteen shifts of calls were recorded for each department; shifts were selected to represent all times of day and days of the week. More evening shifts were observed than night shifts to reflect the normally increased police activity during these periods. Calls were monitored from entire police jurisdictions, not just from study neighborhoods. Each call was coded by location; only 11 percent of all calls recorded were attributable to study neighborhoods. The sample of calls obtained thus does not permit any statements about the volume of calls to any particular department, but does provide an accurate picture of the distribution of problems facing those departments during the observation period and indicates the pattern of citizen demand for police services.

Citizen Survey Data

Unlike the calls for service data, data from the Citizen Survey apply only to study neighborhoods. The survey was administered by telephone to

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[2]Three small departments contracted with other jurisdictions for telephone answering and dispatch services and thus could not be included as separate units in the study.

approximately 200 randomly-selected residents in each of the 60 study neighborhoods; 12,019 interviews were completed. The survey was designed to obtain information on citizen perceptions of, experiences with, and evaluation of the police agency serving their neighborhood. Of most relevance to an examination of citizen demand are the questions about citizen experiences with police in cases of victimization, assistance, and requests for information.

Observational call data and citizen survey data, while representing similar aspects of citizen demand, are quite different in design and application. First, while calls were coded from entire jurisdictions, the survey data apply only to study neighborhoods. The entire jurisdiction often included industrial and commercial zones not present in any of our residential study neighborhoods. Second, while calls for service were coded only during a short period in the summer of 1977, the survey data draw on citizen experiences for an entire year. Third, calls were observed directly; the survey data represent citizen recollections of past events. Use of two substantially different data sets to measure citizen demand for police services provides an interesting and unique basis for comparison.

Data on Referral Agencies

The Referral Agency Interview Form was designed to record information about the characteristics and practices of social service agencies that accepted police referrals, and their patterns of interaction with the police. Information obtained from this form enabled us to classify community agencies according to the extent of their cooperation with police, the scope of services they provide, their history of service provision, their availability to both the police and the public, their revenue sources and expenditures,

and the number and professional status of their personnel.

An agency was selected for interviewing if it met the following criteria: it had to handle cases dealing with at least 1 of 10 selected social problems, and it had to accept police referrals. The 10 problems, chosen after a careful on-site review and a thorough literature search, were:

- Public intoxication,
- Mental illness,
- Drug abuse,
- Juvenile delinquency,
- Family crises,
- Runaways,
- Victim assistance,
- Aid to the elderly,
- Aid to the indigent, and
- Suicide prevention.

Data on Patrol Officers' Perceptions of Referral Agencies

The Police Officer Interview Form solicited opinions of patrol officers serving study neighborhoods. Several questions dealt with their views on police provision of social services. Officers were asked whether there were any agencies to which they could refer persons who had been involved in domestic disturbances, had a serious drinking problem, or were problem juveniles. They were also asked whether they referred to any one of these agencies on a routine basis. We also sought officers' attitudes on police provision of social services.

Data on Officer Referral Activities While on Patrol

Data on patrol officer referral activities were gathered through observation of officers for entire shifts of duty. Observers rode with officers assigned to patrol in the 60 study neighborhoods; neighborhoods were generally defined as coterminous with police beats. All days of the week and daily shifts were observed.

We noted whether officers referred persons involved in police-citizen encounters to a special police unit or outside agency; if so, the name and type of the agency was noted. We also noted when an observed officer suggested that a citizen contact a specific police unit or outside agency.

Data on Citizen Attitudes Toward Police Referral Activities

Residents of study neighborhoods who had had recent contact with police through a victimization, assistance, traffic accident, or call for information were asked about their experiences with and evaluations of police; their opinions were recorded on the Citizen Debriefing Form. Additionally, citizens were asked a series of questions about police referral. They were asked if the patrol officer or telephone operator with whom they talked had told them to contact anyone else about their problem; if so, the name(s) of the agency mentioned were coded. Citizens were then asked if the police had helped them contact the agency, and if so, how. Citizens were asked to rate their satisfaction with the police referral response. Finally, citizens told us if they had contacted the agency suggested by the police, and if so they described what the agency did and whether it had been helpful. If citizens had not contacted the agency, they were asked why they had not.

The next chapter presents our conclusions about citizen demand and initial police response. Chapter Three discusses findings related to referral agency characteristics and patterns of interaction with police. The final chapter reviews the implications of our findings as they relate to police operations in general and to complaint room procedures in particular. It suggests possible directions for further research on police referral.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT CITIZEN DEMAND AND POLICE RESPONSE

Before discussing referral by either police telephone operators or patrol officers, it was necessary to determine the nature of citizen demand on the police. Without accurate demand data, analysis of police response is suspect at best, rendered nearly meaningless by the lack of an appropriate context for discussion. Careful review of the literature suggested that studies of demand were incomplete, largely ignoring those citizen requests not resulting in patrol car dispatch. Additionally, demand was usually treated as an ancillary topic to such issues as the rapidity of police response, the likelihood of criminal apprehension, and citizen satisfaction with patrol officer actions.

The data base for our analysis of citizen demand consists of more than 26,000 observed calls for service and of more than 12,000 citizen interviews. Both data sets illustrate the range of demand on police. Some of our data are often overlooked by, or unavailable to, police agencies. By offering a detailed view of citizen demand, we hope to provide a clearer picture of the kinds of requests police handle daily and the ways in which demands are processed.

One of the most serious shortcomings of the literature we reviewed was that discussion of demand was often limited to a few very general descriptive categories; it was nearly impossible to decipher the types of calls subsumed within each one. Our observers coded calls from a list of 236 different problems as reported by callers. While these were then combined into 12 general categories selected for their ability to differentiate among types of calls, unlike most other efforts we have displayed

and analyzed an extended set of problem codes (Table 2-1). Reviewing this table enables the reader to sense the variety of demands confronting police. It also shows how the placement of a single type of call can affect the overall pattern of demands. Many calls can arguably be placed in more than one category. Moving calls from one category to another can create a tremendous difference in the percentage of calls credited to each one. Obviously a problem with this and other studies of calls for service is that many problems presented to police have multiple aspects; no single categorization scheme will encompass them all. Call classification schemes must necessarily remain arbitrary. However, without reviewing an array such as that in Table 2-1 it is difficult to draw informed conclusions about citizen demand patterns. Detailed call classification is thus a necessity in analyzing patterns of demands on the police.

Table 2-2 shows the abridged version of the call distribution. There are more calls requesting information than any other service. These calls, nearly one fifth of the total, are rarely recorded by the telephone operators or considered by police planners because they do not normally result in patrol car dispatch. Less than one fifth of all calls concerned criminal incidents, and only 2 percent involved violent crimes (mostly those considered by the FBI as Part I crimes). If calls for service (rather than radio dispatches) are considered a measure of departmental activity, then the crime-fighting role of the police is indeed a small percentage of total activity. Nonviolent crimes, however, were second in frequency to calls for information.

The patterns described above and in the remainder of this report are those of observed calls from 21 departments. If we were to examine the

Table 2-1

Citizen Calls for Police Services, by General Problem Types and Subcategories

Type of Problem	N of Calls	Percent of Total	Percent of Category
1. VIOLENT CRIMES	642	2%	
1. Homicide	9		1%
2. Sexual attack	26		4%
3. Robbery	118		18%
4. Aggravated assault	74		12%
5. Simple assault	351		55%
6. Child abuse	38		6%
7. Kidnap	26		4%
2. NONVIOLENT CRIMES	4,489	17%	
1. Burglary & break-ins	1,544		34%
2. Theft	1,389		31%
3. Motor vehicle theft	284		6%
4. Vandalism, arson	866		19%
5. Problems with money/credit/ documents	209		5%
6. Crimes against the family	29		1%
7. Leaving the scene	168		4%
3. INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT	1,763	7%	
1. Domestic conflict	694		39%
2. Nondomestic arguments	335		19%
3. Nondomestic threats	277		16%
4. Nondomestic fights	457		26%
4. MEDICAL ASSISTANCE	810	3%	
1. Medical assistance	274		34%
2. Death	38		5%
3. Suicide	34		4%
4. Emergency transport	203		25%
5. Personal injury traffic accident	261		32%
5. TRAFFIC PROBLEMS	2,467	9%	
1. Property damage traffic accident	1,141		46%
2. Vehicle violation	543		22%
3. Traffic flow problem	322		13%
4. Moving violation	292		12%
5. Abandoned vehicle	169		7%

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Table 2-1 (continued)

Type of Problem	N of calls	Percent of Total	Percent of Category
6. DEPENDENT PERSONS	774	3%	
1. Drunk	146		19%
2. Missing persons	318		41%
3. Juvenile runaway	121		16%
4. Subject of police concern	134		17%
5. Mentally disordered	55		7%
7. PUBLIC NUISANCES	3,002	11%	
1. Annoyance, harassment	980		33%
2. Noise disturbance	984		33%
3. Trespassing, unwanted entry	302		10%
4. Alcohol, drug violations	130		4%
5. Public morals	124		4%
6. Juvenile problem	439		15%
7. Ordinance violations	43		1%
8. SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES	1,248	5%	
1. Suspicious person	674		54%
2. Suspicious property condition	475		38%
3. Dangerous person or situation	99		8%
9. ASSISTANCE	3,039	12%	
1. Animal problem	755		24%
2. Property check	616		20%
3. Escorts and transports	86		3%
4. Utility problem	438		14%
5. Property discovery	240		8%
6. Assistance to motorist	154		5%
7. Fires, alarms	112		4%
8. Crank calls	114		4%
9. Unspecified requests	425		14%
10. Other requests	99		3%
10. CITIZEN WANTS INFORMATION	5,558	21%	
1. Information, unspecified	248		5%
2. Information, police-related	1,262		23%
3. Information about specific case	1,865		34%
4. Information, nonpolice-related	577		10%
5. Road directions	189		3%
6. Directions, nontraffic	55		1%
7. Request for specific unit	1,362		25%

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Table 2-1 (continued)

Type of Problem	N of Calls	Percent of Total	Percent of Category
11. CITIZEN WANTS TO GIVE INFORMATION	1,993	8%	
1. General information	1,090		55%
2. Return of property	156		8%
3. False alarm	176		9%
4. Complaint against specific officer	105		5%
5. Complaint against police in general	350		18%
6. Compliments for police	20		1%
7. Hospital report to police	96		5%
12. INTERNAL OPERATIONS	633	2%	
1. Internal legal procedures	63		10%
2. Internal assistance request	134		21%
3. Officer wants to give information	298		47%
4. Officer wants information	132		21%
5. Other internal procedures	6		1%
TOTAL CALLS	26,418	100%	

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Table 2-2

Frequency and Percentage of Citizen Calls to Police, by Type of Problem

Type of Problem	Number of Calls	Percent of Calls	Range by Department
Violent Crimes	642	2%	0 - 3%
Nonviolent Crimes	4,489	17%	8 - 20%
Interpersonal Conflict	1,763	7%	1 - 10%
Medical Assistance	810	3%	1 - 7%
Traffic Problems	2,467	9%	5 - 15%
Dependent Persons	774	3%	1 - 4%
Public Nuisances	3,002	11%	4 - 15%
Suspicious Circumstances	1,248	5%	3 - 9%
Assistance	3,039	12%	8 - 30%
Citizen Wants Information	5,558	21%	14 - 43%
Citizen Gives Information	1,993	8%	5 - 15%
Internal Operations	663	2%	0 - 10%
Total	26,418		

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same patterns for each department separately, there would undoubtedly be some variation from the overall findings. Table 2-2 also shows the range of percentages by department for each type of call. Although the range for most calls is relatively small, there is considerable variation across departments for calls for information and assistance. Several factors explain this interdepartmental variation. First, we observed departments of widely varying size. For study design reasons, the volume of calls observed in larger departments was greater than that observed in smaller departments. Demand patterns from larger departments therefore outweigh those from smaller ones. Second, because neighborhood social conditions may vary among communities (for example, from central cities to suburban areas) demand patterns may also vary. Departments serving communities with large areas of high population density, for example, may receive proportionately more calls related to noise disturbances than do departments with areas of lower density. Third, departmental organizational factors, such as the type of telephone system, influence the manner in which we recorded demand patterns. Some departments list a single administrative number that citizens may call for all requests, while others maintain a separate number for each office or bureau. Telephone book listings may thus contribute to differences in recorded demand patterns.[1]

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[1]For example, smaller departments appear to receive a much larger proportion of information calls than do larger departments. This may be the result of several factors dealing with trust of smaller government, feelings of alienation, or general reluctance to call police. It may also result from the fact that larger communities tend to have much more detailed listings in local telephone directories about municipal offices and services. The greater the number of separate listings in the phone book, the less likely the police are to receive information requests. For example, if a community has an animal control office and that office is listed in the phone book under municipal offices, the police should get fewer calls asking for information about what to do about stray dogs. Thus the greater proportion of information calls received by smaller police departments may simply reflect the reality that many smaller jurisdictions maintain and list fewer offices to which citizen requests can be channeled directly.

Factors Affecting Citizen Demand

We hypothesized that several factors might affect citizen demand on the police, including citizens' sex, race, and position as private citizens or government or business representatives. These characteristics were noted by our observers either from information volunteered by the caller or from the context of the call. There was little difference in citizen calling patterns by sex, race, or community position. Higher percentages of blacks than whites called about "serious" problems, such as interpersonal conflict; whites were generally more concerned than blacks about property crimes. More than three fourths of the persons requesting service did so as private citizens; of people calling on behalf of businesses, the most frequent calls were predictably those about property crimes. These patterns held for the detailed categories of Table 2-1 as well as for the more general categories of Table 2-2.

Survey Data on Distribution of Citizen Demands

Demand patterns as measured by the 26,000 calls for service were remarkably similar to those as measured by our interviews with more than 12,000 citizens. As explained in Chapter One, citizen survey data is drawn from a different sample population than the calls for service data and is limited to residents of the selected study neighborhoods. We asked neighborhood residents whether they had called the police in the past year to ask for information or assistance or to report a victimization. Once again, information requests represented a large portion of demand; 14 percent of our respondents had called for information. One third of these calls involved information about a specific case; one-fifth dealt with police

or crime-related information in general.

Nearly one fourth of our respondents had requested police assistance within the past year. While many of these requests were for unspecified assistance, others involved disturbances or public nuisances. The final demand component examined with survey data was victimization; residents of 30 percent of the households had been victimized in the year prior to the survey, many of them more than once. Nearly 90 percent of the victimizations involved nonviolent crimes including burglary, theft, and vandalism; 9 percent involved violent crimes. Slightly more than half of the victimizations were actually reported to police.

Comparison of Demand Patterns from Two Data Sources

In comparing demand patterns from survey data to those from calls for service data (first to total calls for service, then to calls from study neighborhoods only), important differences appear (Table 2-3). We expected greater differences when comparing survey results to calls for service from the entire jurisdiction since the sample populations are so different; only 11 percent of observed calls were from study neighborhoods. This appears to be the case for some types of citizen demands, but not others. In fact, patterns are surprisingly similar. The only type of request with more than a 4 percent difference between data sets involves nonviolent crimes (31 percent of survey requests, only 17 percent of total calls for service).

Several factors explain the differences between the data sets. First, the citizen survey noted citizens' recollections; calls for service were observed. Second, the survey did not ask citizens about efforts they

Table 2-3

Components of Citizen Demand for Police Services: A Comparison Between Citizen Survey and Calls for Service Data

	Citizen Survey					Calls for Service	
Type of Problem	Requests for Information	Requests for Assistance	Victimizations Reported to Police	Total	Percent of Total	Percent of Total Calls Observed	Percent of Calls From Study Neighborhoods Only
Violent Crimes			312	312	4%	2%	3%
Nonviolent Crimes		6	2,463	2,469	31%	17%	22%
Interpersonal Conflict		204	21	225	3%	7%	10%
Medical Assistance		251		251	3%	3%	2%
Traffic Problems		438		438	5%	9%	6%
Dependent Persons		130	1	131	2%	3%	3%
Public Nuisances		754	75	829	10%	11%	16%
Suspicious Circumstances		271	25	296	4%	5%	7%
Assistance		1,194		1,194	15%	12%	14%
Citizen Wants Information	1,908			1,908	24%	21%	4%
Citizen Gives Information						8%	10%
Internal Operations						2%	3%
Total	1,908	3,248	2,897	8,053		26,417	2,954

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had made to provide the police with information, nor were any internal operations requests noted; these problems represent 10 percent of total observed calls and 13 percent of calls observed from study neighborhoods. Percentages of each type of call are similar across data sets, with calls about nonviolent crimes, public nuisances, and assistances common in both. Calls for information represent about one fourth of the survey requests and of the total observed calls for service, but only 4 percent of the calls for service assigned a location code matching one of our study neighborhoods. This is because for most information calls, police operators did not ask for the caller's name or address. Instead operators reduced "talk time" by simply answering the question, transferring the call, or referring the caller. Very few observed information calls were traceable to a specific location within a study neighborhood. A final reason for the differences between the two data sets is that all assistances and reported victimizations from the citizen survey were considered to have been phoned in to police by the respondent or a household member; some may have been reported by friends or neighbors.

Summary of Findings on Citizen Demand

Patterns of citizen demand for police services from two different data sets exhibited remarkable similarity; differences were attributable to factors associated with the research design and not to a "true" difference in demand. Requests for information comprise one of the largest segments of demand yet are often bypassed or ignored. These calls may be the only contact many citizens have with their police. They require operators' time and that of persons in other departmental offices to whom calls may be

transferred or referred. While calls about crimes are nearly as frequent as those requesting information, most involve nonviolent or property crimes. About 80 percent of citizen requests are for noncriminal services, corroborating findings from previous studies. Caller attributes, such as sex and race, are generally poor predictors of the types of requests that police receive.

Analysis demonstrated the importance of presenting the full range of citizen demands when discussing calls for police service. Without adequate description of categories it is impossible to determine the manner in which calls were coded or to accurately compare demand patterns across different data sets. While a set of call categories applicable to all departments or analyses is neither necessary nor possible, specification of the components of each category is crucial.

Operator Responses to Citizen Calls for Service

To link citizen demand to referral, we examined police telephone operators' responses to calls for service. Operators must gather pertinent information from callers, translate that information into police-relevant symbols and terminology, and transmit it to dispatchers who are then responsible for placing an officer at the scene as soon as possible. Operators' discretion in handling calls is nearly as great as that of officers in the field. Formulating a response (sending a car, taking or offering information, transferring or referring the caller to another agency or office) is a decision operators must take rapidly and repeatedly.

An operator's response can have important consequences for callers requiring immediate assistance in life-threatening situations or who are

in need of essential information. Citizens who are emotionally strained are not always models of clarity, concision, or coherence. While the turmoil and anxiety of a caller's mental state may be clear, the information communicated by the caller can be sketchy and ambiguous. Phone operators must be able to identify emergency calls and quickly extract and record the information needed for police response.

Operators' responses are also important for police-community relations. About one in every five callers is not reporting anything; instead, the person is calling for information about a variety of concerns, many of which are at best only marginally related to policing. The operator must sort out calls that require a timely police response from a heterogeneous assortment of calls and callers. This task is frequently not an easy one. Yet operators may be the only police officials with whom many citizens interact. They frequently answer citizens' questions, refer callers to another agency, and generally act as a fount of community information. Their responses may be the basis upon which many citizens form opinions of their local police. Operators may foster strong citizen evaluation through prompt and courteous response, or they may create ill will with abrupt, impersonal, or incorrect answers. Operators also exert considerable influence over the behavior of patrol officers. By assigning an incident type to a citizen's request, and by determining the language on a complaint card, operators may create a set of expectations that an officer needs to fulfill or else be prepared to explain and defend his actions.

We have seen the variety of problems that people bring to police attention. For each of the more than 26,000 observed calls, we also recorded

the operator's response(s). Responses were grouped into seven general categories and are shown in Table 2-4. Half the time callers were promised that a police unit would be sent. There is a large difference between the number of calls in which a unit was promised and the number to which other responses were made; the next most frequent operator response (16 percent) is referring the caller. Referrals were either to internal police department units or to community agencies, both public and private.

Table 2-4

Police Telephone Operator Responses to Citizen Calls for Service

Operator Responses	N of Responses*	Percent of Responses	Percent of Calls
Unit Promised	13,196	47%	50%
Referral Made	4,539	16%	17%
Information Taken from Citizen	4,297	15%	16%
Information Provided to Citizen	2,309	8%	9%
Police Cannot Handle the Call	1,427	5%	5%
Call Transferred	1,207	4%	5%
Other, Don't Know Response	1,050	4%	4%
Total	28,025	100%	106%

*More than one response per call was possible.

We considered a response to be a referral whenever an operator promised to call another agency or public office on the citizen's behalf, or to provide (either upon request or voluntarily) the name and/or phone number of another bureau or agency that could better handle the citizen's concern. Often referral occurred when a citizen simply stated a problem; the operator then suggested that the citizen contact a particular agency. Other times citizens requested the phone number of an agency or police unit; if provided by the operator, this was also considered a referral. Referrals

involved operator intervention on behalf of a caller, as opposed to simply taking information.

Another frequent response was to take information from citizens (15 percent). Not all of these responses involve operator action on the citizen's behalf; some simply require that the operator take information. For other calls, the operator may complete a report while the citizen is still on the phone. In still other cases, citizens may be told that the police will take care of the matter, but may not be told that a unit will be sent. Sometimes citizens are told that the police will call them back.

Operators provided information to citizens 8 percent of the time. Sometimes they simply answered a citizen's question, other times they talked with callers who were lonely and wanted someone to talk to. The operators often explained the circumstances surrounding a caller's particular problem or explained departmental policies. Operators also listened to complaints about policies or officer conduct and explained the situation. Responses were coded in this category only if information provision was the primary response and no additional police action was promised.

Five percent of the time operators said that police could not handle the call. In some cases no explanation was given; in other cases, callers were told to call back if the problem persisted or when certain offices were open or individuals were on duty. Citizens were occasionally told that no police action could occur unless the citizen first filed certain papers or took some other action. Frequently the police could not handle an incident because it occurred on private property or outside their jurisdiction. Four percent of operator responses were call transfers.

Whenever an operator provided a direct connection between the caller and either an internal police unit, such as the detective bureau or to any other public or private agency, responses were coded as call transfers.

Analysis of Operator Responses by Subject of Call

Table 2-5 shows operator responses to each of the 12 call types. These findings lend some support to the traditional view of police response that a car will be sent in answer to most calls. "Unit Promised" is the most frequent response in 10 of the 12 call categories. However, the percentage of calls in which a unit is promised drops dramatically with the seriousness of the call. Only for information requests and internal operations calls is promising a unit not the most frequent operator response. Although referrals were second in frequency to unit promised (17 percent of total responses), most referrals occurred in response to citizens' calls for information. Operators referred 45 percent of these requests, more than three times the percentage of referrals made in any other category. Fewer referrals were made in calls about serious crimes than in other kinds of calls. The most common response to most types of calls, other than unit promised, was simply taking information.

Distribution of Referrals

Table 2-6 confirms that more than 4,500 calls (17 percent) were referred. Nearly one fifth of all observed calls were thus handled by a method infrequently recognized even by police agencies. The most commonly referred calls were requests for information, which accounted for 60 percent of all observed referrals. Another 12 percent were calls about general

Table 2-5

Police Telephone Operator Responses to Citizen Calls for Service, by Subject of Call

Operator Response	Violent Crimes	Non-Violent Crimes	Inter-personal Conflict	Medical Assist-ance	Traffic Problems	Depend-ent Persons	Public Nuis-ances	Susp. Circum-stances	Assist-ance	Cit. Wants Info	Cit. Gives Info	Inter-nal Opers.	Total
	Subject of Call												
Unit Promised	80%	69%	74%	69%	63%	60%	70%	71%	36%	2%	34%	27%	13,178
Information Taken	8%	14%	7%	11%	21%	11%	14%	20%	27%	3%	33%	45%	4,294
Referral Made	4%	5%	7%	13%	8%	13%	6%	2%	17%	45%	11%	4%	4,533
Information Provided	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	4%	29%	8%	13%	2,308
Police Can't Handle	3%	4%	7%	1%	4%	9%	5%	3%	7%	6%	5%	3%	1,422
Call Transferred	1%	1%	1%	4%	1%	3%	1%	1%	4%	12%	5%	5%	1,202
Other, Don't Know	3%	6%	3%	2%	2%	2%	3%	2%	5%	4%	4%	3%	1,036
Total Percent	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Total Responses	681	4,613	1,843	955	2,573	836	3,121	1,284	3,262	6,020	2,118	667	27,973

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and nonemergency assistances. No other problem category represented more than 5 percent of total referrals. Calls about violent crimes and internal operations comprised less than 1 percent each.

Percentages of calls within each problem category that were referred are also shown in Table 2-6. Forty-five percent of calls in which citizens requested information were referred. Assistance requests were the next most frequently referred calls (17 percent), followed by medical assistances and dependent persons (13 percent each). Table 2-6 indicates that police telephone operators generally refer calls about violent and nonviolent incidents, interpersonal conflict, and public nuisances and disturbances less frequently than they do information requests, calls providing information, dependent persons, and medical assistances.

Table 2-6

Citizen Calls for Police Service Referred by Departmental Telephone Operators, by Type of Problem

Subject of Call	Number of Referrals	Percent of Total Referrals	Percent of Calls Referred in Each Category
Violent Crimes	30	1%	4%
Nonviolent Crimes	226	5%	5%
Interpersonal Conflict	118	3%	7%
Medical Assistance	124	3%	13%
Traffic Problems	197	4%	8%
Dependent Persons	106	2%	13%
Public Nuisances	179	4%	6%
Suspicious Circumstances	39	1%	2%
Assistance	547	12%	17%
Citizen Wants Information	2,692	60%	45%
Citizen Gives Information	235	5%	11%
Internal Operations	30	1%	4%
Total	4,523	100%	

Although percentage differences across problem categories are small, the data indicate that, with the exception of medical assistances often handled by other agencies, the more "serious" the call the less likely it will be referred. Most referrals were operator-initiated (about 60 percent), while about 30 percent were referred at the caller's request.

Table 2-7 shows the distribution of referrals to various agencies. Most referrals were made to internal police department offices rather than to external agencies. Only 8 percent of all referrals were to social service agencies. Other law enforcement agencies received nearly one fourth of all referrals.

Table 2-7

Types of Agencies Receiving Police Referrals

Agency Type	Percent	N
Internal Social Service	2%	74
Internal Law Enforcement	53%	2,347
Community Social Service	6%	265
Other Law Enforcement	23%	1,026
General Public Services	11%	478
Private Services	6%	267
Total		4,457

Summary of Findings on Operator Responses

Police telephone operators are street-level bureaucrats, interacting with the public in a manner that has direct bearing on citizens' lives. They act as boundary spanners, assembling information and channeling it upward through the police hierarchy as well as outward to the public and laterally to police dispatchers and eventually to patrol officers. Operators represent one of the primary contact points between the police and

the public. How well they perform their role not only affects the public image of the department, but helps determine the activities of patrol officers who must respond to citizen calls for service. Police telephone operators enjoy largely unchecked discretion in the way they handle citizens' calls for service. Analysis of more than 26,000 operator responses showed that citizens were promised that a unit would be sent only half of the time. The remaining citizen requests afford operators ample opportunity to apply their discretion; they may answer a caller's question or provide other information, transfer the caller to another office, refer the caller to another agency, or simply take down the information offered.

Operators act as information brokers not only for police dispatchers and patrol officers, but for citizens as well; they took information from or provided information to citizens 25 percent of the time. As part of their information provision role, operators referred nearly one in every five callers either to internal police department offices or to external agencies. The more "serious" the call, however, the greater the likelihood of operators promising a unit and the less the chance of a call being referred. Caller attributes had little effect on whether a call was referred. Most referrals went to internal police department offices rather than to external agencies. Only 8 percent of all referrals went to social service agencies. Data thus indicate that referral is a common (if often overlooked) technique for police call handling.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT REFERRAL AGENCY CHARACTERISTICS AND PATTERNS OF INTERACTION WITH POLICE

The data base for our examination of referral agency characteristics consists of interviews with representatives of 103 referral agencies located in the Rochester, New York; Tampa-St. Petersburg, Florida; and St. Louis, Missouri metropolitan areas. We examined agency sponsorship, staffing practices, revenue sources, clientele, and types of services rendered. Data on officers' referral activities in the field come from direct observation of more than 900 full patrol shifts while riding in squad cars. We looked at both direct referrals, where steps were taken to connect citizens to a helping agency, and suggested referrals, where officers merely suggested that citizens contact an agency without attempting to initiate the contact.

Referral Agency Characteristics

Our literature review revealed no previous comparative analysis or description of the characteristics and practices of agencies that accept police referrals. We attempted to fill this gap as a step toward formulating research that may eventually be able to address the key issue of referral's effectiveness. We studied a mix of public and private agencies, some of which were sponsored directly by police departments. Although a few agencies operated under a legal mandate, especially those dealing with alcoholism or mental illness, most had established only voluntary relations with police. Each agency selected for interviewing provided services related to at least 1 of 10 social

service problems: public intoxication, mental illness, drug abuse, juvenile problems, family crises, runaways, problems of crime victims, problems of the elderly, problems of the indigent, and suicide prevention. Since the categories are quite broad, most of the agencies provided several interrelated services. Table 3-1 shows the primary interest of each agency; data is missing because some representatives were unable to specify a single interest.

Table 3-1

Number of Referral Agencies, by Area of Primary Interest

Primary Interest Area	Number of Agencies	Percent of Agencies
Public Intoxication	10	11%
Mental Illness	6	6%
Drug Abuse	8	8%
Juvenile Problems	31	33%
Family Crises	14	15%
Runaways	1	1%
Problems of Crime Victims	6	6%
Problems of the Elderly	5	5%
Problems of the Indigent	14	15%
Total	95	100%

Agency Revenue and Staffing

Given the diversity in referral agency sponsorship and scope of services provided, we expected that revenue sources would be similarly diverse; this was indeed the case, although nearly half of the agencies studied received at least some of their operating funds from federal sources. United Way or Community Chest funds supported about half of

the private organizations. Private agencies generally enjoyed a broader range of support than did public agencies. Although most agencies, public or private, received funds from several different sources, more than half received at least 75 percent of their revenue from a single source. There was a similar diversity in size of agency staffs. More than half employed at least 10 full-time staff members and many augmented their staffs with part-time or volunteer assistance. Most employed at least some professionals. The median number of total employees for the agencies examined, including part-time and volunteer staff, was about 15.

Agency Availability

Our data only partially substantiate common police complaints that referral agencies are often unavailable when needed the most. More than 60 percent of the agencies we examined served areas equal to or larger than entire counties; only 10 percent were restricted to a neighborhood or other designated service area not coterminous with municipal boundaries or larger areas. Agencies operated by police departments, including family crisis intervention teams and victim assistance programs, were generally not restricted to serving the sponsoring department's jurisdiction. Although most agencies served wide areas, many were open only during the 8 am to 5 pm business hours Monday through Friday and were unavailable in the evenings and on weekends. This lends some support to police claims about agency unavailability during important periods. Many of the organizations

that were open 24 hours daily provided services primarily to juveniles, victims of crime, the elderly, and persons with severe family problems. Certainly police confront these issues at night and on weekends as well as during regular business hours. However, we found that agencies which were open 24 hours a day were no more likely to receive referrals than were agencies open only during the daytime. This may reflect the fact that the most common means of police referral does not involve officers placing citizens in direct contact with agencies, but instead includes providing citizens with enough information to allow them to contact the agency themselves. If this is the case, then police complaints of referral agencies keeping "bankers' hours" are in many cases inconsequential.

Agency Clients and Relations with Police

We found that private agencies generally handled more clients per week than did public agencies. Most private organizations maintained several sources of clients and received less than 10 percent of their clients from the police. Nearly 80 percent of referred clients were kept under an agency's care for a week or longer. Police social service units handled, on the average, fewer clients than did other public agencies. Data indicate that police may refer more frequently to agencies with higher proportions of professional staff members, but we were unable to examine control variables to confirm this finding.

Police employ a variety of methods for placing clients in contact with social service agencies; the most common is simply providing the

agency's name and address to the citizen. Rarely do patrol officers call agency representatives to the scene to take charge of a citizen; providing transportation for citizens is even more infrequent. Some referred clients are subject to legal sanctions if they do not cooperate with referral agency personnel; in these cases, the referral may stipulate that the client must attend an approved counseling program or enroll in a treatment center to avoid prosecution. About half of the agencies interviewed accepted clients who would otherwise have been charged with an offense. Not all eligible police departments utilize referral agency services; agency representatives generally attribute this to a lack of police officer knowledge about either the existence or usefulness of their organizations.

Patrol Officer Referral Activities During Police-Citizen Encounters

Having examined police referral from the agency perspective, we then analyzed it from the patrol officer's viewpoint. Previous data provided only an indirect indication of the prevalence of patrol officer referral; observational data from riding more than 900 full patrol shifts with officers from each of the 24 departments offer the percentage of total observed encounters in which a referral occurred. Our data indicate that patrol officers infrequently refer citizens. A direct referral occurred in only 5 percent of the nearly 5,700 observed police-citizen encounters (Table 3-2). Officer referrals to internal police department offices, including social service units, nearly equal those to external offices. Referrals to internal law enforcement offices,

such as those to juvenile officers or detectives, more than double those to any other source. Social service referrals account for nearly 30 percent of all referrals and are evenly divided between police and community agencies; referrals to social agencies were observed in fewer than 2 percent of all encounters.

Table 3-2

Number of Police-Citizen Encounters in Which at Least One Referral Occurred, by Type of Referral Agency

Type of Agency to Which Referral Made	Number of Encounters in Which Referral Occurred	Percent of Total Encounters in Which Referral Occurred	Percent of Total Referrals
Internal Social Service Unit	40	0.7%	14%
Internal Law Enforcement Unit	106	1.9%	36%
External Social Service Agency	43	0.8%	15%
Other Law Enforcement Agency	51	0.9%	18%
General Public Service Agency	21	0.4%	7%
Private Service Provider	30	0.5%	10%
Total	291	5.2%	100%
		(5,687)	(291)

In addition to making direct referrals, in which patrol officers take active means to connect the citizen with the agency, patrol officers often suggested that citizens contact another agency for assistance. Table 3-3 indicates that referrals were suggested in slightly more than 7 percent of observed encounters. Fewer suggested than directed referrals were made to either internal police or social service units. There were few encounters in which both a direct and a suggested referral were made; a referral of one or the other type occurred in about 12 percent of all observed encounters. Although this may seem like a "low" rate of referral, it may be that this is the normal referral

rate for patrol officers. Referral may be an appropriate means for handling only 12 percent of the incidents with which officers are confronted. Whether police administrators are willing to redefine the limits within which referral is appropriate, whether referral agency administrators are willing to redesign the programs they offer, or whether patrol officers will accept referral as appropriate in a given situation will in large part determine referral's growth as a method of handling police-citizen encounters. In any case, the seemingly low incidence of referral hinders the remaining analysis; further conclusions must be considered tentative and preliminary because of the small number of cases upon which they are based.

Factors Affecting the Likelihood of Referral

The type of agency to which citizens were referred of course depends on the nature of the problem at hand. A higher percentage of encounters involving medical assistance were referred than any other, largely because no department studied provided its own ambulance service. Direct referrals of problems involving interpersonal conflict and dependent persons were made to social service agencies more often than those for any other problem. Suggested referrals were often made to general public or private service providers especially when the problem involved a nonviolent crime, traffic situation, or general assistance. Referrals were rarely suggested to social service agencies. Thus while officers make direct referrals to internal and external sources at nearly equal rates, they tend to suggest referrals to external (nonpolice) sources more often than to internal sources.

Table 3-3

Number of Police-Citizen Encounters in Which at Least one Referral was Suggested, by Type of Referral Agency

Type of Agency to Which Referral Made	Number of Encounters in Which Referral Suggested	Percent of Total Encounters in Which Referral Suggested	Percent of Total Suggested Referrals
Internal Social Service Unit	18	0.3%	4%
Internal Law Enforcement Unit	61	1.1%	15%
External Social Service Agency	56	1.0%	14%
Other Law Enforcement Agency	86	1.5%	21%
General Public Service Agency	44	0.8%	11%
Private Service Provider	145	2.5%	35%
Total	410	7.2% (5,687)	100% (410)

We examined several other factors that might affect the likelihood of referral, including the citizen's role in the encounter and the characteristics of the citizens involved. The nature of the problem remained the primary determinant of whether a referral occurred. Although referrals were prevalent when representatives of other units of government (including police officers from other departments, social workers, or patrol supervisors) were present at the scene, their presence, and the referral, was determined by the nature of the incident. Citizens' roles had less impact on the likelihood of referral than expected (Table 3-4). Suspects were among the least likely to be referred, although literature on referral programs often indicates that referral is designed for their benefit. Citizen characteristics, such as sex and race, and their demeanor during the encounter, also had minimal effect on referral outcomes.

Table 3-4

Effect of Citizen Role in Encounter on Referral

Citizen Role	Percent Referred	Percent Suggested Referral	Total
Victim	7%	13%	1,912
Suspect	3%	3%	2,015
Injured Person	20%	0%	91
Witness	4%	5%	159
Requested Service	6%	8%	941
Possessor of Information	7%	3%	414
Other	7%	5%	149

Effects of Structural Variables on Referral

We examined the effects of several structural variables on patterns of referral. With the increasing emphasis on social service provision by police agencies, many departments have established their own internal units that can either provide social services directly to citizens or assist citizens who are referred by other units of their department (or other departments). These specialized units are usually established to compensate for the perceived inadequacy of existing service providers or to improve police effectiveness in dealing with specific problems. Only a few departments in our sample had established such units, so our conclusions should be interpreted with caution. Nevertheless, it appears that officers from departments with internal social service units make referrals at a rate nearly three times that of officers from departments with no special units. However, increased internal referral does not result in increased referral to outside agencies. Internal referral may be partially a function of department size;

larger departments support more specialized units and the rate of internal referrals in these agencies is correspondingly higher than that for smaller departments.

Officers' Awareness of Referral Agencies

We also considered the hypothesis that officers' referral activity is a direct consequence of their attitudes toward or awareness of referral. We interviewed more than 1,400 patrol officers and their supervisors and asked whether they felt that referral was a waste of time; only 15 percent felt that it was. Officers also seemed well aware of referral agencies in their jurisdictions; more than 90 percent knew of agencies that accepted referrals dealing with juveniles, domestic disturbances, and public inebriation. More than three-fourths indicated that they routinely referred citizens to these agencies. Whether "routinely" meant every eligible case, once per week, or once per month was left to the officer's discretion.

Patterns of Interaction Between Police and Referral Agencies

Patterns of interaction between police and referral agencies had little impact on officer awareness of agency presence. The existence of a single authority structure governing referral in a metropolitan area (such as the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, or the United Way) had no impact when agency type was controlled; neither did the presence of both police and referral agency administrators on agency boards of directors. Officers were

predictably more aware of those referral agencies that had established formal written arrangements with police or that operated under a legal mandate than they were of agencies with which they interacted on a voluntary basis.

We examined police-referral agency cooperation by asking referral agency representatives for their perceptions. More than three-fourths thought cooperation was outstanding or good and only 10 percent thought it was inadequate or very poor. When asked how they thought police officers would rate the quality of their agency's services, only half of the agency representatives thought patrol officers would rate their services as outstanding or good, and 12 percent thought services would be perceived as inadequate.

Finally, we looked briefly at citizens' experiences with and evaluation of referral. The citizens we interviewed were referred infrequently, mostly to private service providers. When they were referred, however, they were quite satisfied with the manner in which the police handled their case and generally pleased with the helpfulness of the referral agency.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Some basic conclusions concerning police operations, especially those related to complaint room procedures, are suggested by the findings presented in this study:

- Initial police contact with citizens requesting service is of paramount importance to police response and to citizen evaluation of police performance.
- Most initial citizen contact involves police telephone operators, whose importance is often downgraded by administrators. Complaint room procedures must be improved and operator status upgraded through better personnel recruitment methods, training, and supervision.
- Analyses of the full range of citizen demands are infrequent, but if conducted regularly might alter police personnel deployment and resource allocation patterns.
- Development of a clear conception of the meaning of police referral and of departmental policies and guidelines for its use, both by patrol officers and complaint operators, is necessary if referral is to become a viable method for case handling.

Police officials have downplayed the importance of initial citizen contact with police for too long. In too many departments the communications center has been narrowly viewed as only an internal support unit, a means to route a patrol unit to the scene of a problem as fast as possible. Complaint operators, however, have direct contact with most citizens who seek police assistance and in fact handle a substantial portion of service requests without the aid of other police units. More than 20 percent of all calls to police are information requests; these represent the largest single source of citizen demand. Even so, most departments have little idea how many such calls they receive, where and from whom they are likely to come, and more importantly how their operators

respond to them. Information calls are ignored because they generally do not result in patrol car dispatch. Most metropolitan police chiefs would probably argue that patrol unit response is a key in achieving smooth police-community relations. They would certainly argue that it increases the likelihood of criminal apprehension and helps "fight crime," which is after all the primary police mission. Coincidentally, and happily for the chief, by not keeping a record of information calls, the proportion of "total" calls that result in dispatch is artificially increased. The chief's arguments for beefing up the patrol force are thus strengthened by available demand figures.

Few would be willing to suggest that patrol unit response should be curtailed or that its importance in combatting crime or alleviating public fears should be downplayed. A more popular argument might be that the police should not have to deal with so many calls not involving "real police work," information calls among them. The fact remains, however, that more and more frequently the police are being called upon to perform duties at best only marginally related to crime prevention. Our analysis of calls for service showed that 80 percent of the calls involved noncriminal matters. We suggest that: (1) complaint operators are the first police contact for most citizens seeking assistance, (2) that this contact can influence citizen attitudes toward the police, and that (3) operators are frequently the only police officials with whom citizens interact. This means that operators perform a crucial function in addition to channeling information within the department: they are the police to a substantial proportion of people who call for service. If operators are curt or rude, or provide incorrect information, citizens

may become upset and refuse to cooperate with police in the future when their call might bring a patrol unit to the scene of a crime in progress or help save a life.

Operators can be just as important to callers who are requesting a police unit as to those who are not. Studies have shown that citizen expectations of response time can affect their evaluation of police as much or more than can actual response time. Operators might be able to provide citizens with information about when to expect an officer to arrive. All of the recent technological innovations in police response -- computer-assisted dispatching, automatic vehicle monitoring, call locators, and automatic number indicators -- may not make as strong a direct impact upon citizens as operator courtesy, attentiveness, and informed response.

Our findings suggest that police departments should at least consider revamping complaint room procedures. Records of information calls might be maintained and combined with those of other calls in a meaningful analysis of citizen demand patterns. Currently most departments classify their calls according to department-specific incident coding schemes. Records, if maintained at all, are rarely mined for the information they can provide on patterns of demand by location, type of caller, or nature of request. Our research has shown that perceived demand patterns are largely determined by the composition of schemes for classifying calls for service. By focusing on specific demands, police may be able to adjust response procedures to deal with the problems identified. The more specific the call classification schemes, the more focused (and perhaps more effective) will be the response.

Analysis of demand patterns is critical when attempting to prioritize calls for service. Patrol managers interested in implementing a directed

patrol program may be able to free officer time for directed patrol by having operators screen from the dispatch queue all calls not requiring immediate response, or by developing alternative response patterns such as referral. Managers might attempt to find how much patrol unit time is saved per call handled without dispatch. Nearly half of the calls observed in this study were handled primarily by communications personnel or other nonpatrol officers. How many more calls could have been resolved at the complaint desk without dispatching an officer?

Of course, less patrol unit time spent responding to calls for service may create a larger role for the complaint operator. More operators may be needed to screen calls, and they may take more time to answer each call. This implies increased operator importance and responsibility and means that operator training should be greatly improved. No major telephone company would consider assigning individuals to answer their telephones without first training them to handle the equipment, teaching them company policies, and imparting basic communications skills and instructions for proper treatment of callers. Yet as a rule, police agencies that routinely receive both calls about critical matters (requiring complete familiarity with emergency procedures) and calls about more mundane topics (often requiring public relations skills) do not employ highly trained personnel as telephone operators. Very few police agencies have instituted operator training programs. Too often, operators are poorly trained, underpaid, or on temporary assignment (often as a result of disciplinary action). While they may achieve high levels of skill through experience, this means that departments potentially employ operators of vastly different skill levels. To solve this problem, departments must initiate formal training programs, both in-service and entry-level.

Courses could include instruction on departmental policies and regulations and appropriate treatment of callers as well as directions in handling the communications equipment. Operators could also be trained about the existence of community agencies to which callers with particular problems might be referred.

Accompanying increased operator training should be much more careful supervision. Supervision of operators is generally minimal, partly because of the prevailing image of communications as simply an internal support function and partly because it may appear difficult to supervise an operator who is handling a high volume of generally brief calls for service. Yet the means of supervision is present in many departments. Supervisors can listen to exchanges between operators and citizens on an extension phone. Many departments record incoming calls on tape, offering supervisors the chance to review an operator's performance over several different types of calls. Supervisors might review taped calls at a later time, offering suggestions for improvement where appropriate. Increased supervision could encourage operator adherence to established departmental guidelines, improved caller treatment, and improved quality of information obtained. Perhaps most important, supervisors must instill a recognition that while the operator may hear the same problem time and time again, to the caller it could be a new and very disturbing situation. Operators must be sensitive to the potentially dramatic contrast between their perceptions and those of callers; they must be sympathetic yet efficient. It must be the operator's job to share the caller's concern and seek to alleviate it. Costs of improving complaint operator behavior through better personnel recruitment and selection procedures, training, professionalization, and supervision are likely to be minimal compared to the

resulting gains in goodwill and enhanced public cooperation.

A final conclusion from our research deals specifically with referral and involves directions for future research. Departmental leadership in the form of carefully constructed guidelines stating the range of situations for which referral is appropriate and including a list of existing community agencies, their hours of operation and availability, and the kinds of services they provide is sorely lacking and most urgently needed. We attempted to define referral and had an admittedly difficult time; there was little for us to draw upon. Yet our effort seems to be an improvement in the approach to referral that characterizes many departments, which is to continue to conduct business much as they have always done -- occasionally labelling certain actions as referrals. The police must decide if referral is a viable means of handling certain situations, determine what those situations are, determine who should make referrals, openly label their actions as referrals, and set about to make them effective. Our research indicates that police telephone operators are the prime referral agents in a department, yet they are rarely recognized as such. Patrol officers, on the other hand, refer much less often and even then usually make only suggested referrals rather than taking direct action on the citizen's behalf.

Police referral today is a nebulous concept, frequently plagued by definitional uncertainty, intransigent administrators, suspicious patrol officers, confused community agency personnel, and a public that sometimes has only a vague idea of what to expect from its police. What is needed is further research focused on those police-citizen encounters in which policy clearly dictates that referral is viable. Federal and state laws must be clearly understood, as must the ways in which police can interpret them.

When does a public drunk, eligible for referral to an alcoholism treatment center, become a disorderly public nuisance eligible for a trip to jail? We need to specify the problems to which referral can apply, check to see if indeed it is applied, and then, perhaps most importantly, investigate referral's effectiveness in meeting citizen and departmental needs. Referral must not become an end in itself; the police, and those who study their habits, must concern themselves with the consequences of referral if it is to become an accepted, respected, and effective means of police response.

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